Books and the Book World

Announces

LETTERS BY

HUGH WALPOLE *in* AMERICA

Mr. Walpole may reach this country next month and his *London Letters* will be followed, without interruption, by a number of *American Letters* recording his impressions of literary affairs in the United States.

"Crucible Island"

IN *Crucible Island*, which he further describes as "a romance, an adventure and an experiment," Conde B. Pallen has achieved a work of fiction containing something of the flavor of a Zenda story and a Crusoe tale which is, at the same time, a bald criticism of Socialism. A Socialist plotter, one Carl Runder, is caught at his work and is brought before the reigning prince of Unterwald for sentence. When the prince asks the prisoner, if the conditions were reversed and the prince stood in his place, "What would you do with me?" Runder promptly replies: "Execute you or incarcerate you for life." Whereupon the prince sentences Runder to transportation to Schlectland for life.

Schlectland, it appears, is an island that was selected years ago by the chief powers of Europe as a penal settlement for men and women convicted of conspiracies against the state. With a humor no one ever credited to any Government, these European powers agreed among themselves that on this island, in a mountain ringed valley completely shut off from the world, the convicts should live as Socialists under a Socialistis government. This condition of things had been going on for years when Carl Runder was thrust into the Spielgarten, as the colony was called. At first it seemed to be a dream of delight to live according to the principles of Socialism he had preached for so long. But presently the dull, deadly mediocrity of the life not only created but insisted upon by the State aroused his antagonism. In addition to this Carl had fallen in love with Mina Clausen, but as the State did its own mating it was willed that Mina should go elsewhere as an official wife.

This set Carl to seeking an avenue of escape for Mina, her father, Denis McCarthy, and himself, and the chapters devoted to this part of Runder's experiences have the real thrill of romance in them. Mr. Pallen looks at Socialism, we should say, from one viewpoint, and that a rather narrow one as we understand that political and social faith. But this aside, he has written a decidedly interesting story based on the principle that like cures like.

CRUCIBLE ISLAND. A Romance, an Adventure and an Experiment. By CONDE B. PALLEN. New York: The Manhattanville Press.

Book "Reviewers'" Books

By GEORGE GORDON.

LONG ago—in the middle 1890s, to be exact—the imperturbable Max Beerbohm, who had annoyed the literal minded penmen of the time by writing, wisely and well, *In Defence of Cosmetics*, answering his accusers, pointed out that whereas he thought it beneath the dignity of an author to kick his critics, he must, &c.; and thereupon proceeded, ever so cunningly, to tear them limb from limb. It was a cruel business—and easy; for let a man once take to reviewing and soon or late you may prove him a fool out of his own mouth.

A case in point: Under the somewhat shabby heading, *The Day's Best Book*, the Richmond *News-Leader* goes to all lengths to prove my latest indiscretion the worst possible book that, under the circumstances, could have been written concerning *The Men Who Make Our Novels:* "Mr. Gordon is not only arrogant, but supercilious, and waves aside a patient career with a few sentences or else, with a quotation, attempts to summarize a life's work. . . . He has all the faults disclosed by Grant M Overton. . . . It may be true that America has few great novelists, men or women, but those she has are honest, painstaking workers at their craft—and brilliant, Heaven knows, by contrast with the two men who, in this series, have written of them with impudent egotism," &c. Yet in the same review, referring to a baker's dozen of the novelists with whom I deal in the later chapters of my book, this same reviewer says that I have "had to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in and fill the compass of my pages," for some that I include "are scarcely known, even in trade catalogues or among the ghouls of remainder sales." Arrogant? Supercilious? Waving aside a patient career with a sentence? Ye gods! Yet this glass encased Virginian has the nerve to bid me go and read Henry Sydnor Harrison! It is apparently what he has been doing.

All of which, friendship aside, proves that your reviewer is a very negligible person.

I persist in book reviewing, hoping against despair; yet I have not, in I dare not say how long, met, between the covers of a book, so sensible a person as the late Miss Edith Sichel, some time reviewer for the London *Times*. Her *New and Old*—extracts from letters, character sketches of the various differing folk she encountered in her philanthropic work among the poor in the East End of London, articles from the *Pilot*, all prefaced with an instructive and entertaining memoir by Prof. A. C. Bradley—is worthy all attention, is in very truth, "the day's best book" for those who are interested in the art of conversation in England and France, the letters of Saint Catherine of Siena, the beginnings of the feud between Queens Elizabeth and Mary Stuart; for all those who have any curiosity concerning the court of King Louis XI. or the friends and acquaintances of Rousseau and Voltaire.

Miss Sichel published a novel as early as 1893, and as late as 1911 a life of Michel de Montaigne, with through the years between two volumes on Catherine de Medici, two others on the French Renaissance, and still another on the household of Lafayette.

And she wrote well. Casual quotation is unfair—I know: it has been used against me—and proves very little; yet if you refuse to take my word? . . . "The French are excellent administrators, connoisseurs of detail, but bad governors and incapable of measuring big issues." Written in 1902, time adds ever new weight to the truth of her observation. And elsewhere regarding the French point of view: "In France 'Nature' has, before all else, meant the spontaneous relations of man and woman. In England Nature has first meant the face of the universe and the spirit that it breathes upon us. Rabelais and Montaigne looked frankly at the sexes and problems they create; Bacon devoted himself to probing the secrets of the earth. For us no Flaubert; for them no Lake School. Unhampered by conviction of sin, the French are natural, and look upon as natural the half of what we regard as moral, thereby causing misapprehensions that obscure main issues and falsify values of conduct. At this moment England is rediscovering what France has always known—that impropriety and immorality are not identical and that Nature has her say in such things; is rediscovering Nature, in short, with much clatter from novelists and much acclamation of the ballet and the cult of the body—too much fuss about an obvious matter? And France, it would seem from the books before us, has lately awakened to the simple sense of earth and sky and what they bring to us. . . ."

Miss Sichel not only wrote well—I might quote many a fitting phrase—she was sane above the ordinary . . . and yet a book reviewer. Could any surprise be more pleasant?

NEW AND OLD. By EDITH SICHEL. E. P. Dutton & Co.

ROBERT W CHAMBERS has the plot for a new excitator in the mystery of George H. Doran's private office. Everybody who visits the sixth floor of 244 Madison avenue supposes the publisher to be lurking in the large corner room occupied by Eugene F. Saxton. As a matter of fact, Mr. Doran is hard by the elevator. Stepping from the lift, you turn sharply to the right in the gloom and press a concealed button in the wood panelling or rap three times, or something. Be careful the girl at the switchboard does not give the alarm, thus enabling Mr. Doran to escape.

Here Come the Fairies!

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

ANATOLE France in his introduction to his fairy story, *Honey-Bee*, says: "I have a pretty little neighbor of nine whose library I examined the other day. I found many books on the microscope and the zoophytes, as well as several scientific story books. One of these I opened at the following lines: 'The cuttle fish Sepia Officinalis is a cephalopodic mollusc whose body includes a spongy organ containing a chylaqueous fluid saturated with carbonate of lime.' My pretty little neighbor finds this story very interesting. I beg of her, unless she wishes me to die of mortification, never to read the story of *Honey-Bee*."

It is thus that the gentle Anatole registers his contempt for the purely scientific mind. He propounds here a veritable theory of education in regard to the child mind, which in a way might apply to beings of a larger and sillier growth. Is there a more revolting and hideous thing than to know a child of eight who has mastered Hebrew and Latin, knows algebra and can repeat without even skipping Lady Jane Grey all the rulers of England seriatim from Fool I. down to—oh, well?

The art of fanciful and fantastic lying to children about the material universe should be imposed on parents by the State with the rigor of a tax law. In the Perfect State (or even in the Almost Perfect State of Mr. Marquis) a child that reaches its tenth year and denies the existence of Santa Claus should, to our way of thinking, be gently put to death as an atheist, and its parents should be sentenced to chant for the rest of their waking hours the complete works and speeches of William Jennings Bryan on board a beerless submarine. Compulsory stupidity should be the penalty for bringing up children with a reverence for the truth.

Fairy stories come in shoals to the book reviewers. Scholars and "critical recorders" from the four winds of the colossal inkpot of the world chronicle and enlarge on the rise and fall of the various "literary movements," "schools," "cults' and what not. The epic has its day, passes into a "romantic movement," sublimes into naturalism, symbolism, humanitarianism, futurism, Mississippi Valleyism, preciosity and Brandes knows what ism—but the fairy story, for young and old, lives a life apart, above all movements, eternally young from Æsop to Maeterlinck. Beyond schools and movements, topping all economic changes, a populous heaven of miraged cities, the fairy poem and the fairy prose tale pass through the fires of reality like those asbestos boys in the Old Testament whose names I have forgotten.

And, of course, to crib a great epigram, there's a reason. The fairy story is a criticism of life. It is the perpetual protest of man against reality, which is Evil. It is an allegory of escape from the trap of the years. It is the magical soap bubble which the eternal convict of the stars, Man, blows through the bars of his senses into the Empyrean, travelling with it for a way on the broken wing of his hope.

In fairy tomes Happiness always triumphs over Pain and Love over Despair. It is so in Keats's matchless *St. Agnes' Eve* and in the simplest fairy story for the four-year-old. Great fairy stories should be a tremendous satire on human reason, on the constitution of the universe, on the fatality of law. They are the theology of Hope. They are carnivals of freedom given in the dungeons of the Bastile of Circumstance

The Enchanted Island is the latest. It is a fairy tale of love and adventure by Fannie Louise Apjohn. The old machinery is there, but the old machinery of love awaits every lover and sweetheart, and they believe it was all made afresh for them. All fairy stories are absolutely new, Mrs. Apjohn's story is simplicity itself. The Blessed Isle, with the good Prince Daimur; the Isle of Despair presided over by the Magician of Evil; the combat between the two, with the triumph of—whom? Sh—h—h! We daren't tell, only you know it wasn't the Magician of Despair that was the Jack Dempsey of that combat in that never-never archipelago.

It is a beautiful thing to resign your reason, your critical faculties, your three-dimensioned tactility and your mental dignity to pure fantastic bosh. You feel like crying "Humbug, be thou my guide!" "Hocus-Pocus, be thou my heaven!" Oh, for a magic broom that would sweep all the analytical, socio-politico-realistic fiction into the office of the *New Republic* so that we could clear the way for the Fairies!

The Enchanted Island ought to be read by every boy and girl and most of those who have not yet grown up to their boyhood and girlhood.

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND. By FANNIE LOUISE APJOHN. E. P. Dutton & Co.

TO Harry Esty Dounce of *Books and the Book World* and THE SUNDAY SUN readers of these pages are indebted for the numbers of *Books and the Book World* during July; and perhaps the noblest manifestation of his nature was a front page last Sunday about *Golden Days*, enthusiastically written while another was enjoying them.